S.F. Chronicle

Congress Passes Bill to Open Records on JFK Assassination

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The House enacted a comprehensive JFK records bill yesterday, calling for the disclosure of virtually all the government's files on President John F. Kennedy's assassination and setting up a review board to track them down.

The measure, drafted and passed in the Senate in August, now goes to the White House. The Justice Department has said it would recommend that President Bush sign it.

The records, many still secret, are held by Congress, federal agencies and presidential libraries and include everything from CIA and FBI reports to newspaper clippings and tax returns.

Representative Jack Brooks, D-Texas, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, rescued the bill from death-by-adjournment by accepting the Senate version and dropping his demand that the board be appointed by a special panel of federal judges rather than by the president.

Senate Governmental Affairs Committee chairman John Glenn, D-Ohio, a key author of the Senate measure, said the records would be released with little bureaucratic delay. Even before the review board is appointed, affected agencies would be required to start identifying and organizing all their records pertaining to the JFK assassination.

Those records that could be made public immediately would be transmitted to a National Archives special collection that would be set up 60 days after the bill became law. Documents that seem to qualify for "postponement" would be sent to the review board. Its decisions would be final for congressional records and reversible only by the president for executive branch records.

Postponements would be granted only when disclosure would identify an intelligence agent whose identity currently requires protection" or confidential sources who would face "substantial risk of harm" if their identities were made public.

It is expected that the board would need three years to complete its work.

It would have the power to subpoena private parties, conduct hearings and require any government agency "to account in writing for the destruction" of any JFK assassination records.

YESTERDAY IN CONGRESS

■ **FAMILY LEAVE:** The House sustained President Bush's veto of a bill requiring many businesses to give their workers time off in family emergencies. The vote was 258 to 169, well short of the two-thirds majority needed to override the veto.

■ **FOREIGN AID:** The Senate voted to authorize U.S. military aid to the battered state of Bosnia-Herzegovina. On a voice vote, senators said the current arms embargo on the region is serving to maintain a military imbalance in favor of Serbia.

■ **EDUCATION:** The House passed by voice vote the Neighborhood Schools Improvement Act, a wide-ranging education bill intended to raise achievement levels. Republicans failed in an attempt to preserve a Bush administration proposal to use tax credits to help parents who prefer to send their children to private schools.

■ **U.S.-CHINA:** The House voted 345 to 74 to override President Bush's veto of a bill putting conditions on renewal next summer of China's most-favored-nation trade status, three votes less than two-thirds majority needed. The Senate scheduled an override vote for today.

■ **D.C. APPROPRIATIONS:** Approved compromise legislation prohibiting the District of Columbia from using tax dollars, local or federal, to pay for abortions.

■ **TAX BILL:** The House named its representatives to a House-Senate conference committee scheduled to begin work today on working out differences between the two chambers' tax bills.

■ **KENNEDY ASSASSINATION:** Approved a bill that would authorize the government, after nearly 30 years, to release to the public virtually all of its classified investigative files on the assassination of President Kennedy.